

Food riots in Mid-Victorian Exeter, 1847-67

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I

Recent research by social historians has suggested that riot as a form of social protest was the traditional expedient in early industrial England for maintaining certain social norms, for protecting individual and communal 'rights', for regulating prices, and for defending the industrial worker and the agricultural labourer from some of the excesses of expanding capitalism.¹ Moreover, it has been generally accepted that riot was gradually replaced by other forms of popular protest during the early decades of the nineteenth century, notably through organized and articulate working-class political and trade unionist activity; although the remnants of the old tradition lingered on both in widespread agitations, such as the Swing riots of 1830 and the Rebecca riots of the 1840s, and in more highly localized and primarily rural disorders.²

The food riot, in particular, had ceased, by mid-century, to retain the prominence it had held during an earlier period, and it has been suggested by J. E. Stevenson that the last major outbreak of food rioting occurred in Cornwall in the spring of 1847 when poor harvests and a depression in trade prompted disturbances in Penzance, Launceston, and Callington.³

Cornwall was not, however, the only bastion in England of the traditional food riot, for similar disturbances occurred in the neighbouring rural county of Devon in May 1847,⁴ January 1854,⁵ and November 1867.⁶ Within these regional disorders, serious disturbances, popularly denominated 'food riots', and deserving of national press coverage,⁷ took place in the city of Exeter, and on each occasion the respective mayors of the city found it necessary to summon troops to quell the disorders. At first sight, therefore, it would appear that the traditions of the food riot lingered on much longer than historians have hitherto been willing to concede. Indeed, in November 1867, even *The Times* was moved to comment

'a bread riot is so much a thing of the past that the report of the disturbances at Exeter is calculated to create no little amazement'.⁸

The aim of this paper is twofold. First, it seeks to assess the degree to which the Exeter riots belong to the traditions of the food riot. Secondly, it seeks to examine the significance of these disorders in terms of the continuity of forms of crowd activity⁹ at a time when rioting was no longer a commonplace of English social life.¹⁰

II

At midday on Friday 14 May 1847 an altercation at Exe Island between a group of women from the Westgate quarter and a local potato dealer who was conducting regrating deals developed into a riot which the *Annual Register* described as 'formidable'.¹¹ The dealer was assailed with shouts of 'taty grator' by the women, who, in the company of several men and boys, proceeded to give chase, venturing *en route* to abuse and assault a miller, George Buckland, whom they accused of forestalling. Rapidly gathering strength, the crowd marched on the corn market where several farmers and corn dealers were injured in the ensuing scuffles, and several bakers' shops in the city centre were variously besieged by crowds demanding bread and hurling stones at the shop windows. Some bakers, fearful for their panes, emptied their shelves and threw loaves to the crowds. In further incidents, large crowds attacked the quayside stores of J. G. Sercombe, a corn merchant, and Upright's Grist Mill, smashing the windows with volleys of stones. Sercombe's home was similarly besieged. Several persons were accosted in the streets, and there were a few instances of looting, the bread being distributed amongst the crowds.¹²

The forces of order did not succeed in dispersing the rioters until mid-afternoon, their recovery from apparent paralysis coinciding with the return of the Mayor of Exeter, W. Dennis Moore, from London, where he had been attending the Lord Mayor's Banquet. Moore declared his intention of using only civil forces to restore order, although, as a precautionary measure, troops were mobilized at Topsham barracks, and the Pensioners assembled at the Guildhall under Captain Creagh. Special constables were sworn in and accompanied the mayor and the police to the city centre where the crowds were dispersed and several arrests made. During the evening, however, rioting recommenced in the parish of St Sidwell, and also in St Thomas, beyond the jurisdiction of the city authorities on the west bank of the Exe, where considerable violence attended the

run on the bakers. The Yeomanry were called out to quell the disorders in St Thomas but found no county magistrate present at the Exe bridge to direct them into the parish, and on their return to their barracks they were greeted with shouts and missiles from the crowds which had gathered in the city centre, several men being dismounted. The crowds then marched on the Guildhall in an attempt to free those persons apprehended during the day, but, amidst stormy scenes, their efforts were repulsed by police, specials, and pensioners, several arrests being made before the crowds dispersed at midnight.

Isolated disorders punctuated the following day: several women were evicted from a baker's shop in St Sidwell's after demanding bread; the appearance of a group of labourers in St Sidwell's during the afternoon hastened rumours that another disturbance was imminent, although the men were in fact merely heading for the offices of the Land Draining Company in order to collect their wages; crowds gathered in the corn market in the evening but were dispersed by a group of special constables. Sunday passed off quietly, and the services of the Fifth Fusiliers, who had arrived from Newton Abbot, and the East Devon Militia, were not called upon. A return to normality gradually ensued, although it was reported that the market was thinly attended on Tuesday 18 May, despite assurances given to local farmers and traders by the mayor that the troubles were over.¹³

To many contemporary observers, including the Tory press, the riots were regarded as a wanton attempt by a marauding mob of ruffians, whores, and other disorderly elements to attack property and interrupt trade,¹⁴ and it was also asserted that strangers had been responsible for fomenting disorder.¹⁵ However, a closer examination of the riots suggests that they represented a more truly popular expression of legitimate local grievances than contemporaries were prepared to admit, and their form echoes in various dimensions some of the classic features of the 'pre-industrial' food riot delineated by Edward Thompson¹⁶ and George Rudé.¹⁷

The harsh winter of 1846-7 had witnessed rapid increases in the price of basic foodstuffs in a city where poverty, although not acute, was increasing.¹⁸ The price of potatoes, for example, rose from 7d per score to 5s per score between November 1846 and May 1847, whilst wheat prices increased from 77s 11d per quarter to 100s per quarter between April and May 1847.¹⁹ The activities of profiteers created a situation where only limited supplies of bread, often of a doubtful quality,²⁰ were available in the shops, and on the eve of the

riots the retail price of the quartern loaf had reached the record level of 11d. These developments occurred when it was estimated that the Exeter Famine Fund, founded to relieve distress during harsh winters, was assisting between seven and eight thousand people weekly,²¹ almost one-quarter of the population of the city.²² The establishment was not unaware of the strain which this situation had imposed on the labouring population: the Recorder at the Quarter Sessions in March had attributed an increase in the number of committals to the scarcity of food rather than to moral and religious indiscipline,²³ whilst editorials in the radical *Western Times* and the conservative *Woolmer's Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* acknowledged that the poor were suffering severe privations by virtue of high prices,²⁴ and the mayor promised that those who were suffering 'under the present dispensation of Providence' could rest assured that their needs were not forgotten.²⁵ Nevertheless, no emergency measures were taken by the Corporation.

There had been an outbreak of food rioting in nearby Crediton on 11 May, and although there is no evidence to suggest that the Exeter authorities were expecting repercussions in the city it is likely that intelligence of the events at Crediton heightened popular dissatisfaction with food prices. The spontaneous resort to direct action certainly had a popular appeal, three thousand people becoming engaged in the protest, whilst the prominence of the Westgate quarter and St Sidwell's as scenes for rioting is in itself significant, these being amongst the poorest areas of the city whose inhabitants were, perhaps, most sensitive to high prices.

Throughout the riots the targets of the crowds were specific, for, although it had been the activities of the potato dealer which had prompted the initial outburst of pent-up emotion, the subsequent objectives of the rioters were those persons connected with the production and marketing of bread who were commonly believed to be responsible for shortages and high prices. George Buckland, for example, had been advancing with the market, although he later denied this, temporarily closing his shop in protest,²⁶ whilst the run on the bakers and millers was equally selective and discriminatory, only the properties of eleven bakers, four millers, and one corn merchant out of the hundred or so such establishments in the city coming under seige.²⁷

The organization and behaviour of the rioters reflected considerable discipline. Mass intimidation, which tended throughout to be verbal rather than physical, appears to have been intended as both a warning and a punishment for those persons deemed responsible

for shortages and high prices, and violence was in the main confined to stoning, conducted by boys. In this respect, the behaviour of the Exeter crowds contrasts with that of rioters in other Devon towns where instances of *taxation populaire* were reported.²⁸

The language of the rioters was equally indicative of the essential cause of the protest and of the popular belief in its legitimacy. The most popular cries were evidently 'Bread' and 'Forestaller', whilst hisses and groans greeted millers and bakers alike, and several women were heard to complain that they had children at home starving.²⁹ The popular belief that people were entitled to bread at a fair price is perhaps best reflected in the claim of William Davey, a stocking weaver, that 'they had their rights'.³⁰ Significantly, there is no evidence to suggest that political slogans were chanted by the crowd: certainly the Tory press and the Bench would have made much of this had the reverse been true, which underlines the essential nature of the protest.

The Exeter Gaol Calenders,³¹ the reports of the Petty Sessions,³² and the press accounts of the examination of those rioters who had been apprehended³³ do not suggest that the Exeter crowd can be dismissed as a mere mob. Of those persons whose occupations are recorded it appears that they were more representative of local working-class society than some contemporaries were prepared to admit, including several apprentices, two shoemakers, two bricklayers, a stocking weaver, a carter, a husbandman, two vendors, a woodseller, and a sailor. Women had played a major role in the riots, underlining feminine sensitivity to high prices apropos of their role in face to face marketing,³⁴ and four women were examined by the magistrates. Moreover, all the persons apprehended were local people, which to some extent weakens the theory that the riots were the work of strangers, although it is possible that outsiders had been present during the riots but had escaped detection. Finally, the majority of prisoners were respectably attired during the court proceedings, and many of them were literate, some being able to read and write well, whilst there is no evidence to suggest that any of them had criminal records.

The reaction of the city magistrates to the riots was mixed, for whilst they were evidently at pains to stress the serious character of the charges before them, their responses were somewhat tempered by an awareness of the hardship which had prompted certain persons to participate in the disorders. They also appear to have been influenced by the appearance of the prisoners, those appearing well-nourished being immediately suspect,³⁵ whereas considerable

sympathy was extended to three poor women, who were discharged despite evidence against them. Of the twenty-four persons who were examined, eight were discharged, six were fined small sums, and ten were committed for trial. Five persons were ultimately convicted of riot and sentenced to short terms of imprisonment:³⁶ Maria Clatworthy, a widow, was sentenced to fourteen days' hard labour for inciting attacks on the bakers 'with a fury worthy of the French Revolution';³⁷ Anthony Smith, a shoemaker, and William Brock, a husbandman, received similar sentences for encouraging the rioters to smash windows; David Alford, a sailor, was sentenced to one month's imprisonment for looting bread, which he had apparently given to the poor, and Robert Splatt, a carter, and William Southwood received similar sentences for their part in the attack on Sercombe's house. Thomas Latimer, the editor of *The Western Times*, commended the magistrates for their 'mild and lenient spirit of judgement', adding that severe sentences would have excited feelings of commiseration for the culprits.³⁸

In the aftermath of the riots, various proposals for the relief of distress in Exeter were mooted at a meeting held on 22 May. Significantly, in those towns and villages immune from the regional disorders, public subscriptions for the aid of the poor had been implemented beforehand,³⁹ and the Exeter Corporation belatedly followed suit, accepting a proposal that a voluntary rate be collected by the Poor Law Overseers for the purpose of setting up temporary soup kitchens.⁴⁰ The public response was impressive, £900 being donated within the first week, and Earl Fortescue, the Lord Lieutenant of Devon, commended the citizens 'for the munificence of their contributions'.⁴¹ The effect of these measures, however, is less easy to ascertain, for the price of bread subsequently fell, and by July the quartern loaf was retailing at 8½d.⁴² The riots were also instrumental in accelerating the progress of police reform in Exeter.⁴³ Despite the satisfaction expressed by Fortescue in respect of the overall performance of the forces of order during the riots,⁴⁴ it was evident that the day police, comprising eight men, were inadequate to the needs of the situation, and their role was insignificant in comparison with that of the special constables, whilst the police superintendent, Hugh Cumming, had failed to stir from the sanctity of the Guildhall during the troubles. *The Western Times* conducted a vigorous campaign for the reform of the police and for the dismissal of Cumming, receiving considerable public support, and on 16 June the council accepted a scheme for police reform prepared by the Liberal councillor, J. D. Osborn, which provided

for the establishment of a full-time force of thirty men.⁴⁵ Hugh Cumming was subsequently dismissed,⁴⁶ and was replaced by David Steel, the superintendent of the Barnstaple force.⁴⁷ Thomas Latimer duly claimed that 'if the obstreperous women had not turned out and taken possession of the city . . . Mr Osborn might have pleaded himself into a consumption before the Council would have listened to his arguments'.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, as events were to show, the 'new' police force proved no better equipped to deal with popular protests than its predecessor.

III

The winter of 1853-4 was one of the most severe on record, and the freezing temperatures and heavy snowfalls impeded transport and communications within the Exeter hinterland, contributing to food shortages and rising prices in the city.⁴⁹ *Trewman's Flying Post* observed 'the severity of the weather has interrupted labour and provisions are almost at famine pitch',⁵⁰ whilst returns from the parishes suggested that more than 13,000 people were suffering from acute distress.⁵¹ In 1847 the Corporation had failed to attempt to meet the problem of distress until after the labouring population had been driven to direct action, but in December 1853 considerable public attention was devoted to the problem. The Exeter Guardians, for example, decided to increase temporarily the rate of outdoor relief by one-third for two months,⁵² whilst various relief associations were very active, and, in the poor parishes of St David and St Sidwell, temporary relief was provided by the incumbents and the wealthier inhabitants.⁵³ On 4 January 1854 a meeting of the General Standing Committee for the Relief of the Poor directed that monies be set aside for the purpose of establishing an emergency soup kitchen in the Lower Market and for providing recipients with 6d per head.⁵⁴ On Friday 5 January there were troubles at Crediton where traders were obliged to leave the market 'in consequence of threats used to induce them to sell butter below the market price',⁵⁵ and special constables were sworn in to disperse the crowds. In Exeter on 6 January the bakers announced their intention of raising the price of the quartern loaf to 9d in consequence of the advance of the price of wheat to 11s per bushel in the market.⁵⁶ On Monday 9 January women gathered in the Westgate quarter, bitterly complaining of the high price of bread and accusing corn merchants of hoarding grain for the purpose of starving the poor. Considerable dissatisfaction was also expressed in

respect of the quality of the soup being distributed in the market, claims being voiced that this was 'wish-wash', and that those who had made it had eaten all the meat.⁵⁷ Fearing a more serious disturbance, Superintendent Steel despatched a body of police to Upright's mill where a crowd of over two hundred persons, including men and boys, had gathered. Women were seen attempting to recruit passers-by, shouting that only by an attack on the corn merchants and bakers could bread prices be reduced. The Mayor, John Daw, fearing 'that the rioters would combine and commit serious damage',⁵⁸ proceeded to the Cavalry Barracks, and, after consultations with Colonel White, the Dragoons were despatched to the scenes of rioting in the company of the mayor and the magistrates.

Meanwhile, the crowds had descended on Sercombe's stores where volleys of stones were hurled at the windows by small boys. Sercombe's home was also attacked, although the shutters had been put up, and groups of rioters spilled into the Westgate, inflicting damage on the shops of several bakers, including that of Benjamin Clapp, who had been prosecuted for malpractices in 1847. Police and troops arrived in the Westgate at about half-past four in the afternoon and succeeded in restoring order, several arrests being made.

Many rioters, however, receiving news of the presence of the troops, had already crossed the Exe and entered St Thomas where further attacks on the bakers ensued. Daw reported this situation to Montague Bere, a county magistrate residing in the city, and Bere accordingly accompanied a group of troops commanded by Captain Surtees into the parish in pursuit. These forces caught up with the rioters at the farm of Edwin Trood, a wealthy agriculturist and staunch protectionist, at Matford Barton. The farmer had evidently barricaded himself in, but the rioters had gained entry by smashing a window with a piece of lead piping, proceeding to loot plate from the kitchen, rabbits and a turkey from the larder, and cider from the cellars, accusing Trood of forestalling in the process. On the arrival of the troops the farm was cleared and a number of persons were apprehended. Two boxes of lucifers were found on the kitchen floor, and it was held that some of the rioters had intended to burn down the farm, although no such charge was subsequently made. The events at Matford Barton provided the scenario to a short but lively disturbance, and Bere claimed that the efforts of the military had had the effect of 'preserving much property and even life'.⁵⁹ All was quiet on the following day, the city quickly returning to normal-

ity. Forty-six persons were apprehended in connection with the riots, thirty-three of them in St Thomas.⁶⁰

As in 1847, the riots were dismissed by middle-class observers as typical of mob violence. Daw reported to Palmerston that the riots were the work of 'the idle and dissolute',⁶¹ whilst *Trewman's Flying Post*, drawing analogies with the troubles of 1847, claimed that neither were bread riots but merely represented 'the manifestation of a turbulent spirit on the part of lawless scoundrels'.⁶² The *Annual Register* stated that 'the disturbance was made entirely by the idle and depraved part of the inhabitants, and . . . the industrious working men and their families had no part in it'.⁶³ What, indeed, many contemporaries found difficult to accept was that the labouring classes could riot after the Corporation had taken measures to offset the effects of hardship, and this perhaps explains the sense of indignation evident in press reports of the disorders.

The riots were less truly popular than their predecessor of 1847, involving one thousand people at the most. This may be attributed not only to the efforts of voluntary bodies to alleviate distress in the city but also to the fact that although bread prices were high they had not reached the levels experienced seven years earlier, which perhaps reduced popular sensitivity to high prices. Moreover, it is significant that St Sidwell's, where great efforts had been made to assist the poor, was immune from the troubles. Nevertheless, the size of the crowds, their emergence in the squalid and poverty-ridden Westgate, and their general behaviour are indicative of more than a mob hell-bent on indiscriminate attacks on property.

The targets of the crowds were specific, both in Exeter and St Thomas, all but one of the twenty-one properties attacked belonging to persons connected with the production and sale of bread, and, as in 1847, it appears that only those persons popularly believed to be hoarding grain or charging excessive prices were singled out by the rioters, including several persons who had suffered in 1847. Once again, the language of the rioters is suggestive of a desire for bread at a fair price: the cries of the women outside Upright's mill indicate that it was popularly held that only by a repetition of the action taken in 1847 could cheaper bread be secured; whilst at the market, people were heard to complain that 'they didn't want the D..n soup; they wanted bread, and would have it'.⁶⁴ Moreover, there appears to have been a popular consensus of opinion that not all millers and bakers were responsible for the current shortages and high prices: Charles Avery, a carpenter, was heard to cry out 'Don't injure the little bakers, they can't help it: but go down to Sercombe's'.⁶⁵

In general, the rioters displayed considerable discipline: as in 1847, women played a major role in the instigation of the disorders, in recruiting members, and in leading the crowds; violence was limited to the stoning of shops, a task conducted by boys; looting was rare, although some bakers threw loaves to the crowds; no physical assaults were made on millers or bakers, although events in St Thomas, and particularly at Trood's farm, do suggest that, but for the arrival of the troops, the violence might have become more serious.

The riots appear to have been a purely local response to high bread prices and shortages. Despite the troubles at Crediton, the authorities did not expect repercussions in Exeter and were taken by surprise when women gathered in the Westgate. Popular opinion attributed the riots to local people, and no attempts were made to blame 'outsiders' for the troubles. Although simultaneous outbursts of rioting had occurred in different parts of the city, it appears that two groups of rioters played a more prominent role in the disorders than others. The initial troubles in Exeter, for example, were the work of a number of women from the Westgate, a mixture of servants, needleworkers, and fish dealers, who were joined by Avery and John Sergeant, a whitesmith. The crowds active in St Thomas, and later apprehended at Matford Barton, consisted largely of apprentices under the leadership of George Brice and William Davis, both dealers, Charles Tuckett, a shoemaker, and Amelia Perkins, a laundress. Nevertheless, the rioters emerge as a working-class crowd highly representative of local crafts and trades, the persons apprehended including nine labourers, four smiths, two shoemakers, two stonemasons, four dealers, two servants, two errand boys, a mason, a moulder, a carpenter, a tailor, a whitesmith, a papermaker, three laundresses, and several street vendors.⁶⁶ The presence of a number of craftsmen and labourers perhaps reflects the effect which the harsh winter was having on the building trades and their dependents in Exeter. Twelve women were amongst those persons apprehended and there is no evidence to support contemporary assertions that they were profligate, although it is possible that undesirables of both sexes had been present during the riots. The *Annual Register* claimed that 'a number of boys and girls were tried at Exeter for their share in these riots (and) they were all convicted',⁶⁷ but the evidence shows that only adult ringleaders were ultimately convicted,⁶⁸ and also suggests that the majority of persons examined by the magistrates were respectably dressed and by no means illiterate. The *Western Luminary* suggested that the

riots had been instigated in 'the haunts and homes of the Irish',⁶⁹ yet no obviously Irish names appear in the Gaol Calendars, and, on the whole, it would seem that the prisoners were representative of local working-class society and were motivated by legitimate grievances.

The attack on Trood's farm warrants a closer examination. Trood was a wealthy man well known in the area as an opponent of 'the cheap loaf', and had also acquired notoriety as a result of evidence which he had given to the Poor Law Commissioners in 1843 which had advocated the use of the whip to maintain discipline amongst apprentices.⁷⁰ Trood had once been prosecuted for horsewhipping a girl in his employ, and, at the time of the riots, was engaged in the prosecution of one of his labourers for theft, the latter being a poor man with crippled children to support (one of whom had lost a hand in an accident with a ploughchain whilst in Trood's employ). This case had prompted a fierce attack on the farmer by Thomas Latimer in the editorial columns of *The Western Times*,⁷¹ the editor drawing attention not only to the unjust prosecution now pending but also to the pauperising wages which Trood was known to pay to his labourers. Latimer further alleged that Trood's father had given evidence against food rioters in 1795, as a result of which one man was hanged,⁷² an allegation which was inaccurate.⁷³ Nevertheless, Trood was evidently unpopular and a number of possible motives emerge for the attack on his property. The farmer later suggested that the riots were the result of Latimer's campaign,⁷⁴ a view with which *The Western Luminary*⁷⁵ and *Trewman's Flying Post*⁷⁶ discreetly concurred, although such assertions had little foundation and may more properly be explained in terms of the commercial and political rivalry existent between local newspaper proprietors.

The riots once again revealed the limitations of the Exeter police. Although Steel's force acted promptly, it proved too small to contain the initial disorders, and it was the speedy deployment of Surtees's troops which enabled order to be restored without extensive damage to property being incurred. The failure of the 'new' police to cope with the troubles offers an interesting contrast with the increasing efficiency of other reformed borough forces with respect to riot control during the period,⁷⁷ particularly in view of the fact that the crowds were much smaller than those of 1847. An investigation by the Watch Committee into the disorders exonerated the police,⁷⁸ and the Council appeared generally satisfied with the performance of the forces of order, commending both Steel and Surtees for their efforts.⁷⁹ Moreover, the belief that the police force

was adequate to the needs of the city remained, the Council resisting incorporation with the county police in 1856⁸⁰ Indeed, in the aftermath of the riots, the Exeter police successfully petitioned for a pay rise of 2s per week.⁸¹

Fifteen persons were convicted of rioting in March 1854. The county magistrates imposed sentences of between six and nine months' imprisonment on nine persons, including Brice, Davis, Tuckett and Perkins, in connection with the disorders in St Thomas.⁸² The Exeter magistrates imposed lighter sentences of between two and four months' imprisonment on six persons, including Avery, Sergeant, and two women, for the troubles in the city.⁸³ Generally, both county and borough magistrates displayed considerable leniency, particularly towards women and boys: of the twelve women apprehended, nine were discharged, whilst the majority of youths taken in St Thomas were dismissed after being severely admonished. In essence, only those rioters directly involved in leading serious attacks on property were convicted, the view being expressed that they had incited younger persons to participate.⁸⁴

IV

In October 1867 the inhabitants of Cathedral Close petitioned for the prohibition of the traditional Fifth of November celebrations,⁸⁵ which had often been lively affairs involving clashes with the police,⁸⁶ on the grounds that the usual assemblage of persons would constitute a danger to property. The Mayor of Exeter, Alderman Head, acceded to this request, but received, on 4 November, a letter which threatened: 'it will be to your sorrow if you dare to interfere with our rights and usage which has not been interfered with for centuries'.⁸⁷ The letter was signed 'Young Exeter'. Fearing possible disorders, Head issued a public notice for the swearing-in of special constables. Three days earlier, serious food riots had taken place in Teignmouth⁸⁸ where several thousand people had launched attacks on the shops of butchers and bakers, it being widely held that high prices in the west country were due to the fact that the area was subsidising London, a charge vigorously denied by *The Times*.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, rumours circulated in Exeter that similar disorders would follow in the city, a factor which perhaps strengthened Head's resolve to appoint special constables.

These developments took place when it was widely held that no great hardship existed in the city. The retail price of basic foodstuffs was not unduly high, potatoes averaging 1s per score, beef and

mutton 7½d per lb, and flour 52s per sack⁹⁰ whilst *The Western Times* noted that 'the weather has been mild, labour abundant, and wages rising'.⁹¹ *The Times* even suggested that food prices in Devonshire were generally lower than in many parts of the country, whilst Head later informed the Home Office that 'there was nothing in the price of provisions or in the destitution of the labouring classes to justify the [subsequent] outbreak'.⁹² On the other hand, as Thomas Latimer suggested later, there had been considerable discussion of 'The Food Question' in the columns of the national press which may have heightened popular sensitivity to food prices locally.⁹³

On the evening of 4 November a crowd of some two hundred persons headed for the Exe bridge in response to a rumour that a disturbance was imminent in St Thomas. The crowd, however, found the parish quiet, and were returning to the city centre when two boys, quite by accident, apparently, broke the window of a baker's shop. The sound of breaking glass arrested the progress of the crowd, many of whom now believed that a run on the shops of tradesmen had begun, and who began to throw stones at shop windows. On receiving news of the disorders, Steel despatched a body of police to the spot, but their presence appears to have reinforced the popular belief that a riot was in progress, and the troubles escalated. Within a short time rioting had become very general, and by nine o'clock over seven thousand people filled the city centre.⁹⁴

The subsequent disorders did not reflect the basic characteristics common to the riots of 1847 and 1854. Rather than being confined to the Westgate quarter or the city centre, rioting was widespread, damage to property incurred by stoning affecting the shops of tradesmen throughout the city. Neither were the targets of the rioters as specific as in previous riots: of the 101 properties damaged, 49 belonged to persons connected with the 'bread chain', 21 to butchers, and the remainder to assorted tradesmen and professional persons,⁹⁵ suggesting that the riots represented a general dissatisfaction with prices, although within this context bakers and butchers received special attention. The composition of the crowds was more representative of Exonian society at large rather than of local working-class society: large groups of boys were prominent throughout the disorders, whilst women played a relatively insignificant role in the development of the riots, although many later joined the crowds in the city centre; some rough-looking men were present, but so too were 'young men of respectable appearance with sweethearts on their arm',⁹⁶ as were older and reputable

citizens who suggested that the butchers might improve their business habits as a result of the attacks on their shops;⁹⁷ and the crowds were swelled by many by-standers, eager to discover what all the commotion entailed. Finally, although cries of 'Bread' were heard to emanate from the multitudes this did not have a popular appeal: some people did demand bread from bakers, including several who had suffered attacks during previous riots, and some looting did occur, but the demand for bread, however legitimate in certain instances, was a minority one.

Rioting also spilled over into St Thomas where, ironically, Thomas Dimond, a baker who had suffered during the riots of 1847 and 1854, had earlier advised Hamilton, the Chief Constable of Devon, to take precautions in view of the rumours that rioting would occur. Hamilton doubted whether such measures were necessary, a decision he was to regret during the subsequent disorders, for, since the East Devon Militia were being deployed in Exeter, there were only limited police forces at his disposal when some of the rioters crossed the Exe.⁹⁸

The riots once again severely taxed the forces of order. Alderman Head did not believe that he had sufficient civil force at his disposal to quell the troubles, and the Militia, commanded by Captain Savile, were called from their barracks to assist the police and specials.⁹⁹ Head initially believed that it would be unwise to read the Riot Act in case this inflamed the situation, but his appeals to the crowds to disperse fell on deaf ears, whereupon the mayor telegraphed General Spencer at Devonport and requested military assistance. Two hundred and fifty men of the Twentieth Foot were accordingly mobilized, leaving Raglan Barracks at eleven-thirty by special train under the command of Major Eldridge. Meanwhile, Head led his combined forces out into the city where the crowds gradually dispersed, largely, it would appear, due to the news that the military had been summoned. Several arrests were made, and when the troops arrived at two o'clock in the morning the streets were almost deserted,¹⁰⁰ the mere presence of the soldiers being sufficient to hurry the remaining 'dingy, ill-looking fellows and bedraggled women'¹⁰¹ off to their beds. In St Thomas the riots also petered out, largely through the erection of a cordon of county police across the Exe bridge to prevent further incursions from Exeter. The mayor divided his combined forces into three groups which patrolled St Sidwell's, the Westgate, and St Thomas overnight, with fifty men on guard outside the Guildhall, but there was no resumption of the rioting, although further disturbances were

expected to accompany the Guy Fawkes celebrations later that day.¹⁰²

On 5 November the mayor arranged for the mobilization of the Pensioners under Colonel Pigot, and two troops of Yeomanry under Sir John Duckworth, the earl of Devon, were despatched to the city. No fewer than 800 special constables were now enrolled, many of them stationed in Cathedral Close in case attempts were made to fire the customary bonfire.¹⁰³ In the early evening the crowds duly marched on the Close, forcing the specials to retreat under a hail of stones and fireworks. Troops were called in, bayonets fixed, and the crowds temporarily dispersed, returning once the soldiers were recalled. On this occasion the presence of the Yeomanry cavalry appears to have exacerbated the situation. Volleys of stones and fireworks wrought havoc amongst the horses, making it impossible for the force to restore order. The crowds marched towards the Exe bridge in search of some timber wagons which the troops had secreted in St Thomas but were met by a cordon of police, backed up by infantry, on the bridge. After scuffles had broken out between police and public, the troops advanced with fixed bayonets, forcing the crowds to retreat. Four people were arrested before order was finally restored shortly after midnight.¹⁰⁴

In the aftermath of the riots a number of explanations for the troubles were forthcoming. Alderman Head suggested that 'the riot was prompted by emissaries from elsewhere . . . rather of the class of life of clerks or shopmen than of mechanics or labourers'.¹⁰⁵ The *Gazette* blamed 'the least industrious, the worst conducted, the most improvident, the intemperate, the noisy, and the absolutely ignorant',¹⁰⁶ adding that the seizure of bread was a hollow pretext of men who thought they were bound to play the part of a hungry crowd, and concluding 'we have in our country large numbers of a dangerous class ready to create tumult on the slightest pretences'.¹⁰⁷ *Trewman's Flying Post* wrote in similar vein and referred to 'a plot within a plot' whereby the organized efforts of 'Young Exeter' to set the magistrates at defiance had been supplemented by the activities of ruffians who had arranged a repeat in Exeter of the Teignmouth riots.¹⁰⁸ In contrast, *The Devon Weekly Times* suggested that the Teignmouth riots had heightened popular dissatisfaction with prices in Exeter,¹⁰⁹ whilst *The Western Times* attributed the troubles in part to popular ignorance, Latimer urging that 'special means be taken . . . to explain the working of supply and demand which so effectively takes the control of prices out of the hands of local dealers'.¹¹⁰ *The Times* denied that the riots had anything to do with

the price of bread, or of foodstuffs in general, and attributed the disorders to popular spirit associated with the Fifth of November.¹¹¹

Fifteen people were arrested in connection with the riots of 4 November, the majority of whom were youths – the very people most affected by Head's decision to ban the annual bonfire. Eight persons were discharged by the magistrates, and of the seven who were committed for trial only three were convicted of riot, each receiving three months' imprisonment: William Gale, for encouraging attacks on the bakers in St Sidwell's and in the city centre, in the course of which he had clashed with special constables, shouting 'Now you B.....s, Now's your time';¹¹² John Gibson, a woodseller, for his part in the attacks on property in Southernhay; and James Warren, an apprentice, for throwing stones at shop windows.¹¹³ In general, the Bench was lenient, regarding most of the prisoners as foolish youngsters excited into making pointless attacks on property.¹¹⁴

Thomas Latimer was particularly critical of the performance of the police after yet another embarrassing experience,¹¹⁵ but no reform of the force was entertained by the authorities. In a letter to the Home Office, Head expressed the opinion that 'special constables are of no great avail in any sudden tumult . . . there is no means of distinguishing them in the dark from the roughs, and if they do not fight each other they do not act much in concert',¹¹⁶ and accordingly advocated 'a National Guard and an armed police'.¹¹⁷ This letter gives the impression, overall, that the mayor was more concerned about the safety of his own home during the riots than with the causes and significance of the disorders, and he later requested that troops be quartered in the city during the winter months to afford added security in the event of further troubles. On 20 November arrangements were made for two officers and fifty-seven men from the Western Division to be sent to the city.¹¹⁸

Claims for compensation arising out of the attacks on property totalled £277 7s, drawing the opinion that the riots represented 'rather a cheap frolic on the whole',¹¹⁹ a view shared, no doubt, by James Upright, a baker, who claimed that his property had been spared by the rioters because he had been selling his quartern loaves at only 6½d each.¹²⁰ The trouble in Exeter was but one of several riots which erupted in Devon towns and villages during the first week of November, and although Home Office correspondence is not indicative of direct links between these disorders – which appear to have resulted from complaints over food prices, exuberance arising from the annual festivities, and wanton violence committed

by the rougher elements of society¹²¹ – it would seem that events at Teignmouth certainly heightened popular concern with prices in Exeter and thereby contributed to the disorders, although there were purely local grievances which also underlay both the troubles of 4 November and those of Guy Fawkes night.

V

Although popular opinion in Exeter denominated the riots of 1847, 1854, and 1867 as 'Bread Riots', the evidence suggests that only the riots of 1847 and 1854 represented genuine working-class reactions to bread shortages and high prices. Both riots were spontaneous and short-lived responses to hunger from crowds representative of local working-class society, and the subsequent targets, organization, behaviour, and language of the rioters is indicative of a desire for cheaper bread, which was regarded as a natural right. Moreover, although some undesirables were present during the disorders, their presence did not distract the crowds from their missions, and allegations that the riots were the work of the idle and dissolute appear unfounded.

The riots of November 1867, however, represented a combination of popular sensitivity over the price of provisions in the city, heightened by the events at Teignmouth and public discussion of 'The Food Question', and public disapproval of the mayor's decision to prohibit the traditional bonfire in Cathedral Close, a decision which undermined local custom and attacked a 'right' acquired over centuries. The riots lacked the spontaneity of previous riots since rumours of a disturbance had been brewing for several days and the city was in an expectant and excited mood by 4 November, and the subsequent development of the riots contrasts sharply with the previous ones. J. E. Stevenson has suggested that many later food riots rarely denoted a subsistence crisis but rather a consumer reaction to prices that were considered to be unfair,¹²² and this would seem true of the riots of November 1867 which appear more indicative of a 'grocery riot', within which some legitimate demands for bread existed, but one which was compounded of other social grievances.

Whilst these riots are indicative of working-class sensitivity with respect to 'the food question', to which the supply and price of bread was central, their changing form during the period 1847–67 suggests that progressively fewer people were prepared to voice their dissatisfaction with food prices by concerted direct action. The riots

of 1847, for example, involved over 3000 people, of whom the vast majority voiced genuine demands for bread; in 1854, when the material condition of the labouring classes was worse than it had been seven years earlier, only 1000 people were moved to demonstrate; in November 1867, when bread prices were lower than they had been in 1847 and 1854, great crowds became involved with the disorders but the demand for bread was a minority one. Indeed, what in essence emerges in mid-Victorian Exeter is the gradual demise of the food riot as a form of popular protest, albeit later than in other parts of the country. The relative longevity of this particular form of protest in the ordered, intimate, and deferential society of a mid-nineteenth century cathedral city warrants further examination, and an assessment of the significance of the disorders on a local level provides several possible explanations for this particular feature of social life in Exeter.

First, mid-Victorian Exeter was no longer as prosperous a commercial centre as it had once been. Whilst the Reverend G. Oliver, writing in 1861, could claim that he had 'witnessed with inconceivable delight the progressive alterations affected by the Boards of Commissioners, Trustees of the Turnpikes, and Directors of the Water Company', concluding that 'no reasonable being need seek elsewhere a residence more salubrious, comfortable, polite, and friendly . . . whose inhabitants are more orderly, patriotic, and obedient to the law',¹²³ there can be little doubt that by the mid-century, Exeter was in decline economically and was facing growing problems in relation to working-class poverty and hardship. During the first half of the nineteenth century several traditional local crafts and trades, notably those connected with the woollen industry, had all but disappeared from view,¹²⁴ and although this was offset to some degree by the employment prospects engendered by the growth of the administrative functions of the city, the expansion of some service industries, the advent of the railways, and the growth of the shopocracy, the local economy was static by mid-century with few incentives for expansion. Between 1850 and 1870 a substantial proportion of the male labour force was still engaged in the building trade and its associated crafts, in the coaching trades and their ancillaries, and in service industries, whilst many working-class women were employed as servants. As Robert Newton has suggested, Exeter was a low wage area within a traditionally conservative, rural, and essentially agricultural region, and lacked competition from other industrial centres, representing 'a provincial capital which carried far into the new era the traditions and habits of the old

... a social and cultural survival from pre-industrial England'.¹²⁵

Artisan and labourer suffered most as a result of these changes, at a point in time when it has been suggested that material conditions for working people improved.¹²⁶ In his examination of living standards in Exeter during the period, Robert Newton has suggested that there is no clear evidence to suggest that, locally, the age was one of improvement – instead wages for working-people remained virtually static, whilst prices showed a considerable increase.¹²⁷ Unemployment further added to the plight of the worker, particularly in the construction trades where the period not only witnessed a lessening of the pace of urban expansion but was also accompanied by a number of harsh winters which brought employment in these trades to a standstill, and the presence of smiths, moulders, carpenters, and labourers in the riots of 1847 and 1854 is particularly significant in this context. The authorities found it exceedingly difficult to come to terms with the problem of poverty despite the public concern evident in the contemporary press and the work of voluntary bodies, although the Corporation of the Poor hardly improved matters by their reduction of outdoor relief payments in 1856.¹²⁸ Moreover, poverty was exacerbated by the fact that the bulk of the labouring population still lived within the old city walls, despite an increase in the population of the city from 17,412 in 1801 to 32,818 in 1851,¹²⁹ as a result of which problems of overcrowding, insanitary conditions, and public squalor became acute. The situation in the parishes of St Edmund, St Mary Major, and St Mary Steps, which jointly comprised the Westgate area, was particularly bad, with one-fifth of the population of the city, including contingents of Scots and Irish labourers, cramming the filthy courts and tenements. Here, and in St Sidwell's, social tension was no doubt at breaking point, particularly in times of dearth, and it is likely that in 1847 and 1854 increases in the price of bread were the last straw for those persons most affected by cyclical unemployment and its attendant hardship. The resort to direct action, primarily prompted by a genuine desire for a cheaper and more abundant supply of bread, but perhaps reflecting other legitimate socio-economic grievances, emerges as a popular response to want, and is indicative of the nexus between lags in socio-economic development and the persistence of traditional forms of crowd protest to which Gareth Stedman-Jones has alluded in his study of late-nineteenth century London.¹³⁰

Secondly, the course of working-class politics took a different direction in Exeter from that characteristic of the northern industrial

towns. The early decades of the nineteenth century marked a period of prosperity for Exeter as a whole, in contrast with her northern counterparts, and the city was immune from the mass industrial and political protests which were a feature of industrial England in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars and during the 'hungry forties'. Moreover, the nature of local industry was not conducive to the development of a factory system and a corresponding increase in working-class consciousness and solidarity, although there were a few large concerns. Instead, most trades and businesses operated on a small scale, reinforced by various systems of apprenticeship, and paternal control of the economy effectively inhibited the development of working-class politics. Trade unionism made little headway. In 1834, sixteen men who had attempted to form a bricklayers' union were committed for trial on conspiracy charges,¹³¹ and even Latimer concluded that 'the unions are decidedly mistaken in many of their practices and principles',¹³² whilst, forty years later, a bricklayer was heard to comment that in Exeter 'a man could not express his feelings . . . as he could in larger towns' for fear of becoming a marked man.¹³³ Only in the 1870s were building workers and foundry workers able to secure a measure of uniformity in terms of wage rates.¹³⁴ Working-class radicalism was equally retarded, Chartism in particular making little headway, although a delegate to the National Convention was elected at a stormy meeting in April 1848.¹³⁵

In essence, the conservative influence of Dean and Chapter, of a city council of Tory persuasions composed largely of professional men, and of the small masters were significant controls over the growth of working-class politics, and in practice the virtual absence of organs for the peaceful and articulate expression of popular grievances must have heightened a propensity to riot when times became really hard. David Jones has suggested that in conservative environments – which Exeter, specifically, and Devon, generally, were – riot often lingered on as the release valve for social discontent as the crowd moved slowly from Tory traditionalism to class-conscious aims,¹³⁶ and it would appear that this was the tendency in mid-Victorian Exeter, working people turning to direct action as a last resort in the absence of a viable alternative. In this light, the particular role played by apprentices in the riots of 1847 and 1854 is not without significance.

Thirdly, beneath the veneer of order depicted by the Reverend Oliver, Exeter was prone to periodic outbreaks of rioting, despite the fact that the city was a good deal less turbulent than many of her

contemporaries. Such disorders belong largely to the less serious 'B' category disturbances detailed by David Philips,¹³⁷ and resulted in few committals at the city Quarter Sessions. In 1832, for example, rioting accompanied the burial of cholera victims in Southernhay, Thomas Shapter recounting that a number of assaults were made on the officers of justice, although the ringleaders were discharged by the magistrates after a severe reprimand.¹³⁸ Disorders involving soldiers from the Exeter Barracks occurred in 1832¹³⁹ and 1844,¹⁴⁰ the latter incident involving a battle between soldiers and police,¹⁴¹ although both riots appear more reflective of high spirits stimulated by alcohol than of any clearly identifiable social protest. More serious, perhaps, were those disorders rooted either in ancient local custom, such as the Fifth of November celebrations, or in the religious sensitivity of a staunchly Protestant populace, as manifest in the 'Surplice Riots' of 1844-5,¹⁴² disorders which involved large sections of the community and posed numerous problems for the forces of order. Although there had not been a bread riot in Exeter since 1801, when there had been instances of popular price setting,¹⁴³ the riots of 1847-67 may in part be seen as belonging to a local tendency - 'tradition' is perhaps too strong a word - to resort to direct action on sensitive issues, particularly when it was popularly held that certain 'rights' had been infringed. On a wider level, continuity in the form and content of crowd activity in Exeter endorses the thesis that direct action often acted as a means of preserving communal identity in the face of external pressures and deep-seated social changes.¹⁴⁴ This is particularly true of the Fifth of November celebrations, for the corporation was undoubtedly keen to suppress the festivities and the police were persistently used to interfere with the proceedings, and the decision to ban the annual bonfire in 1867, which attacked traditional rights and tested communal loyalties, undoubtedly contributed to the disorders which ensued.¹⁴⁵

Fourthly, the Exeter riots must also be seen as a problem of policing. The process of police reform in Exeter during the period endorses a number of points raised by police historians (including Hart,¹⁴⁶ Tobias,¹⁴⁷ and Reith¹⁴⁸) with respect to the part-time nature of period forces, their inefficient organization (which bordered on the amateur), and the gradual and piecemeal nature of provincial police reform. Whatever the merits of the reforms of June 1847, the course of the riots of 1847, 1854, and 1867 suggests that both unreformed and reformed forces were not equipped to deal effectively with mass agitations, and, moreover, failed to learn from their

mistakes. Indeed, on each occasion, the police failed to contain the initial disorders, necessitating the deployment of additional civil and military forces. Although the military were used to quell disorders during the period,¹⁴⁹ however, the evidence tends to suggest that provincial forces in general were gradually beginning to acquire expertise in handling riots and were also gaining that public respect which in itself was sometimes sufficient to defuse potentially serious situations¹⁵⁰ – in this respect the overall performance of the Exeter police contrasts unfavourably with that of the Black Country forces, which had been brought under the terms of the 1856 Police Act, during the same period.¹⁵¹ In essence, the Exeter police were too small in numerical terms to cope with serious disorders, and Home Office correspondence indicates that the city authorities were fully aware of this fact,¹⁵² although little was done to remedy the situation. In practice, the relative ease and speed with which additional civil and military forces could be summoned in the event of a riot was in itself an inhibiting factor in relation to improved police methods and tactics, whilst local control of policing and the unwillingness of the city council to add to the financial burdens of the ratepayers was hardly conducive to the development of an adequate and professional force. At the root of the malaise lay the perpetuation of the authorities' traditional and parochial attitudes on questions concerning public order in Exeter during a period notable for improvements in policing on a national level.

Finally, the Exeter riots must be viewed in their regional context, for each disturbance in the city was accompanied by equally serious disorders in other parts of Devon. In 1847, rioting began in Crediton, spread to Exeter, and then broke out in Newton Abbot, Ashburton, Totnes, Kingsteignton, Torquay, Exmouth, and Honiton. In 1854, the pattern was similar, troubles breaking out once again at Crediton and passing through Exeter to Morchard Bishop, Newton Abbot, Torquay, and Tiverton. In 1867, regional disorders were sparked by events at Teignmouth, and, in addition to Exeter, rioting was reported in Shaldon, Torquay, Newton Bushel, Crediton, South Molton and Kingsteignton. The geographical distribution of these regional disorders would suggest that the troubles were interconnected, despite the lack of evidence which Home Office Disturbance Papers and contemporary press reports shed on this matter. Certainly, in respect of the Exeter riots, it would have been almost impossible for the city to have escaped any ripples of the discontent which flowed in from the surrounding countryside, and intelligence of riots elsewhere would most certainly have been brought into the

city by farmers, tradesmen, and travellers, although there were also purely local issues which were evidently sufficient to incite riot in Exeter. Yet local sources tended to attribute the troubles in the city to local causes and local people, which the Gaol Calendars, magistrates reports, and press reports tend to corroborate. This question still requires further examination, for this paper has been principally concerned with the Exeter riots in their local rather than their regional context, but there can be little doubt, at least, that events elsewhere heightened a propensity to riot in the city on each occasion.

Collectively, these factors go some way towards providing an explanation for the longevity of the traditions of the food riot in mid-Victorian Exeter. Outwardly a manifestation of popular concern with the supply and sale of bread (1847 and 1854), and with food prices in general (1867), at heart the riots were the reflection of a city in transition, of a society faced with economic stagnation on the one hand and growing social problems arising from the relative deterioration in the material condition of working people on the other. Central to these issues was the prevalence of the city authorities' traditional attitudes to the organization of the local economy and the nature of social policy in the city which inhibited the development of working-class politics, leaving riot as a release valve for social discontent in a city which had become, in many ways, an anachronism in an age of progress.

Notes

¹ See R. B. Rose, 'Eighteenth-century Price Riots and Public Policy in England', *International Review of Social History*, vi (1961), pp. 277-91; E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *Past and Present*, 50 (1971), pp. 76-136; J. Stevenson, 'Food Riots in England, 1792-1818', in *Popular Protest and Public Order*, ed. J. Stevenson and R. Quinault (1974), pp. 46-65; E. J. Hobsbawm, 'The Machine Breakers', *Past and Present*, 1 (1952), pp. 57-67; A. Booth, 'Food Riots in the North-West of England, 1790-1801', *Past and Present*, 77 (1978), pp. 84-107; G. Rudé, *The Crowd in History* (1964), pp. 33-46; E. P. Thompson, 'Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture', *Journal of Social History*, 7 (1974), pp. 382-405.

² See especially J. P. D. Dunbabin, *Rural Discontent in Nineteenth-century Britain* (1974), and in particular A. J. Peacock's study, 'Village Radicalism in East Anglia, 1800-50', pp. 27-61.

³ Stevenson, *Popular Protest*, p. 64.

⁴ *Annual Register*, 1847, p. 58.

⁵ *Ibid.*, (1854), p. 9.

⁶ *Ibid.*, (1867), p. 152.

⁷ *The Times*, 17 May 1847; 9 Jan. 1854; 23 Mar. 1854; 7 Nov. 1867.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 7 Nov. 1867.

⁹ For a further discussion of this feature, and also a useful bibliography, see R. J.

Holton, 'The Crowd in History: some problems of theory and method', *Social History*, 3 (May 1978), pp. 219-33.

¹⁰ F. C. Mather, *Public Order in the Age of the Chartists* (Manchester, 1959), p. v. For an alternative viewpoint, see D. Richter, 'The Role of Mob Riot in Victorian Elections, 1865-85', *Victorian Studies*, xv (Sept. 1971).

¹¹ *Ann. Reg.*, 1847, p. 58.

¹² The course of the riots is fully detailed in the *W(estern) T(imes)*, 15 May 1847, and 22 May 1847; *W(oolmer's) E(xeter and) P(lymouth) G(azette)*, 15 May 1847 and 22 May 1847; *T(rewman's) F(lying) P(ost)*, 20 May 1847; *W(estern) L(uminary)*, 18 May 1847.

¹³ *W.T.*, 22 May 1847.

¹⁴ *W.E.P.G.*, 22 May 1847.

¹⁵ *W.T.*, 15 May 1847.

¹⁶ Thompson, *P & P*, 50, pp. 76-136.

¹⁷ Rudé, *Crowd in Hist.*, pp. 33-46.

¹⁸ R. Newton, *Victorian Exeter* (Leicester, 1968), p. 71.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-91.

²⁰ For example, several bakers were prosecuted for various malpractices in connection with the production and sale of bread: see D(evon) C(ounty) R(ecord) O(ffice), MS. 55 Exeter Magistrates Record Book, 18 May 1847 and 19 May 1847; *W.T.*, 22 May 1847.

²¹ *The Times*, 3 Apr. 1847.

²² The Census of 1851 gives the population of Exeter as 32,818.

²³ *W.T.*, 20 Mar. 1847.

²⁴ See the *W.T.*, 15 May 1847; *W.E.P.G.*, 22 May 1847.

²⁵ *W.T.*, 22 May 1847.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ W. White, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Devonshire* (Sheffield, 1850). lists ninety-four bakers and ten millers in Exeter.

²⁸ For further details, see *W.E.P.G.*, 22 May 1847, and *W.T.*, 22 May 1847. For example, in Newton Abbot a group of navvies marched on the bakers' shops, taking away loaves, and leaving what was considered to be a 'fair price' on the counters; in Ashburton a group of women seized sacks of wheat from a farmer's cart and sold it at 8s per bushel in the corn market; in Buckfastleigh a crowd proceeded to local farms and requested farmers to sell wheat at 10s per bushel and barley at 3s per bushel, and forced them to sign a document to this effect; in Honiton a group of women intervened to arrest the sale of potatoes by a regrator, forcing him to reduce his prices; in Exmouth bakers reduced their prices after being threatened by a crowd of 500 people that their shops would be demolished if they refused to comply with popular feeling.

²⁹ *W.T.*, 15 May 1847.

³⁰ D.C.R.O., 55 Magistrates Record Book, 17 May 1847.

³¹ D.C.R.O., 265 Gaol Calendar Book of the City of Exeter, 1837-54.

³² D.C.R.O., 55 Magistrates Record Book, 17 May 1847; 18 May 1847.

³³ *W.T.*, 22 May 1847; *W.E.P.G.*, 22 May 1847.

³⁴ See Thompson, *P & P*, 50, pp. 76-136.

³⁵ *W.E.P.G.*, 22 May 1847 reported the examination of John Miller, an apprentice, who had evidently had his dinner with his father before becoming involved in the riots, and one of the magistrates, J. Carew, was moved to comment: 'This is one of the cases in which one feels no compunction in committing a prisoner. We can all feel what hunger is, but here is a person who has had his dinner and is in good employ and he goes out for the purpose of promoting a disturbance.'

³⁶ See D.C.R.O., 265 Gaol Calendar, June 1847; *W.T.*, 3 June 1847.

³⁷ *W.T.*, 3 June 1847.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 26 June 1847. Thomas Latimer acquired a considerable local reputation as a radical man of action during the period. An outspoken critic of Toryism, and

particularly of the Exeter Corporation, friend of Dickens, supporter of the Complete Suffrage Union, and Corn Law repealer, Latimer was appointed a Poor Law Guardian and an Improvement Commissioner in 1849, and a Justice of the Peace in 1851. A useful outline of his life and work is to be found in R. Lambert, *The Cobbett of the West* (1939).

³⁹ *W.E.P.G.*, 15 May 1847. Public subscriptions for the relief of the poor had been set up in Teignmouth, Dartmouth, Paignton, Brixham, Devonport, South Molton, and Ottery St Mary, temporary soup kitchens being established in each.

⁴⁰ *W.T.*, 22 May 1847.

⁴¹ *T.F.P.*, 27 May 1847.

⁴² *W.T.*, 3 July 1847.

⁴³ R. Newton, 'Law and Order in Exeter, 1837-48', *Report and Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, xciv (1962), pp. 493-530.

⁴⁴ *W.T.*, 29 May 1847.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 19 June 1847.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 29 July 1847.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 19 June 1847.

⁴⁹ Newton, *Vict. Exeter*, p. 150.

⁵⁰ *T.F.P.*, 12 Jan 1854.

⁵¹ *W.E.P.G.*, 7 Jan 1854.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Public Record Office. Home Office. H.O. 45/5244D, Doc 291, Peter Smith, Clerk to the Justices, to Palmerston, 9 Jan. 1854.

⁵⁶ *Ann. Reg.*, 1854, p. 9.

⁵⁷ For further details of the course of the riots see *W.L.*, 17 Jan. 1854; *W.T.*, 21 Jan. 1854; *W.E.P.G.*, 21 Jan. 1854.

⁵⁸ P.R.O. H.O. 45/5244E, 455, Daw to Palmerston, 13 Jan. 1854.

⁵⁹ P.R.O. H.O. 45/5244E, 456, Bere to Palmerston, 13 Jan. 1854.

⁶⁰ *W.T.*, 14 Jan. 1854; 21 Jan. 1854.

⁶¹ P.R.O. H.O. 45/5244E, 455.

⁶² *T.F.P.*, 12 Jan. 1854.

⁶³ *Ann. Reg.*, 1854, p. 9.

⁶⁴ *W.T.*, 14 Jan. 1854.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 25 Mar. 1854.

⁶⁶ See D.C.R.O., Gaol Calender Book, March 1854; Magistrates Record Book, Jan. 1854.

⁶⁷ *Ann. Reg.*, 1854, p. 10.

⁶⁸ *W.T.*, 25 Mar. 1854; D.C.R.O. Gaol Calendars.

⁶⁹ *W.L.*, 17 Jan. 1854.

⁷⁰ Newton, *Vict. Exeter*, p. 152.

⁷¹ *W.T.*, 7 Jan. 1854; 21 Jan. 1854.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 7 Jan. 1854.

⁷³ See *T.F.P.*, 19 Jan. 1854; 26 Jan. 1854. For a detailed analysis of these riots, and of the trial and execution of Campion, the only food rioter to be executed, see J. Bohstedt, 'Riots in England, 1790-1810, with special reference to Devonshire' (unpub. D. Phil. thesis, Cambridge, Mass., 1972), pp. 100-7.

⁷⁴ *W.E.P.G.*, 14 Jan. 1854.

⁷⁵ *W.L.*, 17 Jan. 1854.

⁷⁶ *T.F.P.*, 12 Jan. 1854.

⁷⁷ See D. Philips, 'Riots in the Black Country, 1835-60', in *Popular Protest and Public Order*, ed. J. Stevenson and R. Quinault (1974), pp. 141-80.

⁷⁸ D.C.R.O. MS 502, Exeter Watch Committee Minutes, 1852-56, 11 Mar. 1854.

- ⁷⁹ P.R.O. H.O. 45/5244E, 455.
- ⁸⁰ D.C.R.O. MS 502, Minutes, 17 May 1854; 5 May 1855; 8 Nov. 1856. For an account of the development of the Devon County Police force see W. Hutchins, *Out of the Blue* (1956).
- ⁸¹ *W.E.P.G.*, 14 Jan. 1854.
- ⁸² *W.T.*, 25 Mar. 1854.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*
- ⁸⁴ *Ibid.* Justice Martin was of the opinion that the bulk of the rioters were 'the dupes of a number of mischievous persons'.
- ⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 5 Nov. 1867.
- ⁸⁶ J. Cossins, *Reminiscences of Exeter Fifty Years Hence* (Exeter, 1867), pp. 66-8.
- ⁸⁷ *W.T.*, 5 Nov. 1867. The identity of the signatory is unknown.
- ⁸⁸ *W.E.P.G.*, 8 Nov. 1867; *W.T.*, 5 Nov. 1867.
- ⁸⁹ *The Times*, 7 Nov. 1867.
- ⁹⁰ *W.T.*, 1 Nov. 1867.
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 8 Nov. 1867.
- ⁹² P.R.O. H.O. 45/7992, 43, Head to Home Office, 15 Nov. 1867.
- ⁹³ *W.T.*, 8 Nov. 1867.
- ⁹⁴ For further details of the course of the riots see: *Ann. Reg.*, 1867, pp. 152-3; *W.T.*, 5 Nov. 1867; *D(evon) W(eekly) T(imes)*, 8 Nov. 1867; *W.E.P.G.*, 8 Nov. 1867.
- ⁹⁵ D.C.R.O., 55 Magistrates Record Book, Nov. 1867; *W.T.*, 8 Nov. 1867.
- ⁹⁶ *W.E.P.G.*, 8 Nov. 1867.
- ⁹⁷ *W.T.*, 8 Nov. 1867.
- ⁹⁸ *W.E.P.G.*, 8 Nov. 1867.
- ⁹⁹ For a useful account of the role of the First Devon Militia during the disorders, see H. Walrond, *Historical Records of the First Devon Militia* (1897), pp. 367-8.
- ¹⁰⁰ *W.T.*, 8 Nov. 1867.
- ¹⁰¹ P.R.O. H.O. 45/7992, 1, Barton to Home Office, 5 Nov. 1867.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁴ *D.W.T.*, 8 Nov. 1867.
- ¹⁰⁵ P.R.O. H.O. 45/7992, 43, Head to Home Office, 15 Nov. 1867.
- ¹⁰⁶ *W.E.P.G.*, 8 Nov. 1867.
- ¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁰⁸ *T.F.P.*, 6 Nov. 1867.
- ¹⁰⁹ *D.W.T.*, 8 Nov. 1867.
- ¹¹⁰ *W.T.*, 15 Nov. 1867.
- ¹¹¹ *The Times*, 7 Nov. 1867.
- ¹¹² *W.T.*, 3 Jan. 1868.
- ¹¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 12 Nov. 1867.
- ¹¹⁶ P.R.O. H.O. 45/7992, 43, Head to Home Office, 14 Nov. 1867.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁸ P.R.O. H.O. 45/7992, 58, W. Forster to Home Office, 20 Nov. 1867.
- ¹¹⁹ *W.T.*, 12 Nov. 1867.
- ¹²⁰ *Ibid.*
- ¹²¹ For details of the regional disturbances, including riots at Shaldon, Torquay, Newton Bushel, Crediton, South Molton, and Kingsteignton, see *Ann. Reg.*, 1867, pp. 152-3; *W.T.*, 8 Nov. 1867; P.R.O. H.O. 45/7992 for miscellaneous papers relating to the riots at Torquay, Newton Abbot, and South Molton.
- ¹²² Stevenson, *Popular Protest*, pp. 64-5.
- ¹²³ Rev. G. Oliver, *A History of the City of Exeter* (Exeter, 1861), pp. 174-5.

- ¹²⁴ See especially N. Simmonds, 'The Functions and Growth of the City of Exeter, 1800-40' (unpub. M.A. thesis, Exeter Univ., 1959), pp. 11-13.
- ¹²⁵ Newton, *Vict. Exeter*, p. xi.
- ¹²⁶ See, for example, R. M. Hartwell, 'The Rising Standard of Living in England, 1800-50', *Economic History Review*, xiii (1961). For the general debate on the standard of living question, see: E. J. Hobsbawm, 'The Standard of Living during the Industrial Revolution: A Discussion', *Econ. H.R.* xvi (1963); G. J. Barnsby, 'The Standard of Living in the Black Country during the Nineteenth Century', *Econ. H.R.* xxiv (1971); A. J. Taylor, 'Progress and Poverty in Britain, 1780-1850', *History*, xlv (1960); R. S. Neale, 'The Standard of Living, 1780-1844: A Regional and Class Study', *Econ. H.R.* xix (1966).
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- ¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 166.
- ¹²⁹ *Parliamentary Papers*, 'Census Reports', 1801-1851.
- ¹³⁰ G. Stedman-Jones, *Outcast London* (1971), pp. 343-5.
- ¹³¹ D.C.R.O., 264. Gaol Calendar, April 1834.
- ¹³² Lambert, *Cobbett*, pp. 63-4.
- ¹³³ *W.T.*, 24 Feb. 1871.
- ¹³⁴ Newton, *Vict. Exeter*, p. 90.
- ¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 161.
- ¹³⁶ D. Jones, *Before Rebecca: Popular Protest in Wales, 1793-1835* (1973), p. 193.
- ¹³⁷ Philips, *Popular protest*, p. 147.
- ¹³⁸ T. Shapter, *The History of the Cholera in Exeter in 1832* (1849), pp. 236-7.
- ¹³⁹ *T.F.P.*, 18 Oct. 1832; 29 Nov. 1832.
- ¹⁴⁰ *W.T.*, 20 July 1844; 27 July 1844.
- ¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 6 July 1844.
- ¹⁴² For further details see *Ann. Reg.*, 1845, pp. 10-11; J. Boggis, *A History of the Diocese of Exeter* (Exeter, 1922), pp. 500-1; A. Brockett, *Nonconformity in Exeter, 1650-1875* (Manchester, 1962), p. 212; Newton, *Vict. Exeter*, pp. 54-8.
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- ¹⁴⁷ J. Tobias, *Crime and Industrial Society in the Nineteenth Century* (1967), p. 272.
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